

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE HOUSE OF BERNARDA ALBA



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House of Bernarda Alba depicts contemporary civilization & politics of **Franco's regime** through the character of Bernarda – a **matriarchal widow** who suppresses her daughters' **Eros** Instinct, her name symbolizes the force of bear. Adela passionately rebels against Bernarda's tyranny for attaining freedom which she finds by committing suicide. **Bernarda's political agenda** is to keep the inhabitants of the house in enmity for sustaining his rule by providing them lack of options. All the sisters love Pepe and see one another as women and rivals. They all are sexually frustrated, and don't unite in their struggle, that's why never succeed in their struggle.

Lorca was known for his rejection of traditionalist Spain, contempt for bourgeoisie's hypocrisy, and insensitivity of Catholic Church toward the people, in July 1935, he was arrested by fascist police and executed. And he unveiled these issues in his writings.

The dramatic tension is born due to the clash between mother's domineering will, upheld by the force of tradition, custom, and social values, and the **daughters' invincible will for living**. (Franco) Bernarda's political regime takes away the possibilities of individual's happiness and freedom because it isn't easy to overthrow an old order. The play has both Greek and Brechtian theatrical elements.

Constant watchfulness and force obedience on the inhabitants of the house, are the secrets of her success. Her **cane** is the symbol of her tyrannical

power, and weapon with which she beats Martirio in act 2 which she faces with resistance; but it also symbolizes her weakness and old age. Her first and last word is an order directed to others '**SILENCE**' that means she silences unwanted voices; and the house symbolizes prison, convent, grave, and tomb because the play begins with the funeral of Bernarda's husband and ends with Adela's death. She tries to lock her daughters at the name of mourning custom for eight years, which means they'll never get married.

The house is a little society in which Bernarda rules, its walls keep her secrets inside. And for her virginity is decency and sex is corruption. Spanish traditional society imposes the rules on her, and she in turn forces those rules on her daughters and takes away their all rights. She pronounces death penalty for daughters' disobedience but she herself doesn't follow the very same rule because she not only imprisons her daughters but also her mother Maria Josefa by locking her in a room. She maintains her firm control over everybody.

Her only concern isn't her mother's safety but the fear of neighbors' external authority of **gossip** that they may not see Maria in such condition that's why she sends a guard with her. Inside the home, mothers are the victims of their children, and children are the victims of their mothers, and servants are the prey of their mistress' inhumanity.

Martirio, the true antagonist of Adela, is 24 years old and least candidate for marriage because she doesn't have Angustias' money, Adela's looks, Magdalena's humanity or Amelia's ingenuity. She is a physical pathetic, weak, ugly and **hunchbacked**. So she hasn't hope of escaping through marriage, does clock-work faithfully which suggests her resignation, desires to court with **Enrique** but rejected by her mother due to his lower standard. But still her standing in the nightgown till the daybreak beside the window, reveals her sexual desire which she suppresses and bestows hatred for her mother and sisters.

Adela's rebellion in wearing green dress instead of black at the time of mourning and giving a colorful fan to her mother symbolize her sexual nature, and **challenge** to the customs of civilization. The black costumes contrast sharply with the whiteness of the walls, black and white are the colors worn by nuns which emphasizes the metaphor of the house as a convent. Bernarda cares only about the family honor and declares that Adela be dresses as a virgin.

The cruelty, hostility, jealousy, sexual frustration, and rivalry among the sisters is reciprocal. Martirio warns Adela 'I'll tear you out of his arm! None of us will have him! Because she finds her survival in denying others' happiness. Her last sentence indicates future tragedy, her lie about Pepe's death causes Adela's suicide.

She's the young version of Bernarda's tyranny. She joins Bernarda in demanding death for the infanticide while her harsh looking at Adela suggests Adela's pregnancy. The two sisters' verbal struggle turns into a physical turmoil, and the house turns into battleground.

Angustias-anguish, wears an engagement ring, symbolizes her prompt escape from the hell of Bernarda's house and her legal ownership of Pepe but still remains unhappy. Poncia's role is like a watchdog who spies at the neighbors and keep an eye on Bernarda's daughters like a prison guard.

Adela claims that her body will be for whomever she chooses. She's the true granddaughter of Maria who is filled with the very same qualities. Maria's flowers symbolize Eros, as does Adela's green dress with addition of desire to get married. She manages to escape even though Bernarda tries to lock her in the room, and she's going to be silenced by her.

Lorca presents the issues of oppression of women, tradition, class prejudice, reputation, religion, love and sex, authority, beauty, fate and change, death, freedom, honor, wealth and poverty in Spanish rural culture. He has written an 'objective tragedy' in 'photographic record' and naturalistic manner by neglecting his former poetic style. His tragic trilogy follows the Aristotelian canon for tragedy, but breaking of three unities is consistent in the history of Spanish Theatre but his subtle use of the chorus is visible. By eliminating most of the details of telling a story, he concentrates on other theatrical elements. The house of Bernarda Alba is episodic and perfectly circular in structure i.e. begins and ends with death ceremonies. But Bernarda appears to have learned nothing from the experience of losing her daughter.

Lorca rebels against the realistic middle-class drama, which was succeeded in shutting off the rich atmosphere of folk speech and imagination in Spain. His work has a blend of surrealistic imagery and popular folklore but he doesn't romanticized rural life.

In short, House of Bernarda Alba depicts social, political, and domestic issues of Spanish history. Bernarda shows Franco's regime while Adela stands for Republicans struggle for freedom. The shortage of male character heightens the result of tragedy.